

Harvard College Application

Najya Williams
First-Year Applicant
Optional Essay

The sun peeked through the window as I sat with my mother in front of the television. Our daily, morning ritual of watching *A Baby Story* was set to commence as soon as the clock struck seven o'clock. Snuggling closer to her, my little six-year-old eyes were glued to the screen as I watched a new life join this world. My breath was taken away by how gently the pediatricians examined the infant, carefully looking into their eyes, listening to their heartbeat and testing their reflexes. As the newborn inhaled pieces of a brand new world, so did I. Being able to witness a moment as special as the birth of a child sparked an interest in pediatric health that later morphed into an intense passion for changing lives through medical innovation.

After spending those moments with my mother, I continued to hold a fascination with the doctors who were responsible for caring for the lives of these new, precious beings. However, it was not until I lost my grandmother to colon cancer that I became emotionally invested in becoming a pioneer in the medical field. Over the course of my high school career, I have taken courses that examine the prevalence of long-term illnesses in my own community in order to prepare myself for the rigor of the college-level science and mathematics courses that are instrumental in my journey to becoming a pediatrician. As a pediatrician, I aspire to transform the lives of others by finding the cure to a long-term pediatric illness, including sickle cell disease, leukemia and other types of cancer.

In order to make as great of an impact as I desire, receiving a hearty post-secondary education is an important first step. Beyond receiving the certifications necessary to successfully matriculate into graduate school, my undergraduate education will expose me to new perspectives and opportunities to better connect with my community. In order to serve other people, I must be receptive to new ideas and master the ability to adapt as present situations develop. The pediatricians I studied for so many years on the Discovery Health Channel were not only amazing for their ability to do their job well, but also for their ability to connect with each and every one of their patients in a different way. Overall, I hope to use my college education to excel in my role as a pediatrician, activist, and game changer.

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Common Application Essay: 2015

10 May 2015

Topic: Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

During the 2014-2015 school year, I worked with STRIVE NextStep DC, a service organization that aims to empower inner city youth living with sickle cell disease (SCD). My first-hand knowledge of the inner city is one of the main reasons why I was so drawn to working with this organization in the first place. As a native Washingtonian, I am extremely aware of the stereotypes associated with the residents and youth who reside in inner city communities. I live in Ward 7, a neighborhood that is known as one of the most impoverished and violence-stricken regions in the District. However, I have always felt that this depiction of my community was not a realistic understanding of the youth who live here.

I met my future supervisors at a service open house that was required for my service-learning writing course. Upon hearing that I would be able to work with an organization based in Children's National Medical Center, I knew I would be submitting my application that night. I was thrilled at the prospect of working with adolescents who I knew were going to be bright, brilliant and fearless in spite of any challenges or difficulties they may have faced. However, there was something that stood out to me: their program materials and website. In the organization's publications and website, I observed that the socioeconomic status and disparities faced by the participants were highlighted more than the achievements made in their communities. I believed that this was completely inappropriate because it not only stigmatized those who participated in the program, but also set the standard for how others should discuss inner city youth. However, when I attended my first program, the reality of the situation was completely opposite of my pre-existing impression of the organization. Not only was the environment warm, safe, and welcoming, but the disadvantages they faced were the furthest things from everyone's mind and conversation. I was shocked, and immediately thought that there was something seriously wrong with this situation. Why is it that my first impression of STRIVE NextStep DC did not match the reality of my experience?

I would like to encourage service organizations centered in the inner city to use the appropriate language to describe the community members that they aim to serve. The language that STRIVE NextStep DC used to describe their participants encouraged outsiders to not only pity and shun them, but to also believe that the community members are the sole problem. In offering the rhetoric of "urban realism", a language that describes inner city communities realistically but not tragically, I aim to alter the stereotypes associated with inner city youth and their communities as a whole. In an attempt to make strides within my own community and the

organization I was working with, I offered suggestions on how to update the organization's publications and website so that they utilize more appropriate language. I submitted my research project to the Pennsylvania State University Berks' Undergraduate Journal of Service-Learning and Community Based Research, and my project will be included in the journal's fourth issue, which will be released in 2016.

I truly enjoy providing a voice for those who do not have a platform to do so. As I move forward, I hope that my work in recognizing and rectifying this problem will allow inner city youth to escape the stigmas that plague them not only in their communities, but in the organizations meant to aid them. I will continue to work hard and dedicate my time to finding a solution because this is not the end of the journey. Identifying the presence of this problematic language and offering the rhetoric of "urban realism" mark only the beginning of a social revolution that will change the lives of many forever.